



ALLEGHENY COUNTY

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Mon-Valley Residents Urged to Limit Outdoor Activities Due to Air Quality Concerns

PITTSBURGH – Mon Valley residents, particularly those with existing respiratory and/or cardiovascular conditions, children and the elderly, are being encouraged to limit outdoor activities until further notice. A December 24 fire at U.S. Steel’s Clairton Coke Works damaged two gas dispatcher stations and has resulted in several exceedances of the federal standards for hourly SO₂ (sulfur dioxide) emissions. Officials from the Allegheny County Health Department (ACHD) are having ongoing conversations with plant officials about their efforts to address emissions and have ordered additional mitigation strategies.

“We have been closely monitoring this issue since we were first notified of the fire on December 24th. While the plant has substituted natural gas for coke oven gas and extended coking time, there have been four exceedances,” said Jim Kelly, Deputy Director for Environmental Health. “While their strategies appeared to be addressing their emissions, the data from yesterday morning showed two exceedances of the federal hourly standards. We had previously required additional controls be implemented to address each new exceedance. Following yesterday’s exceedances, the plant implemented additional actions to address the issue. We will continue monitoring the situation and consider requiring additional action, including enforcement actions, if necessary.”

Current emissions are of sulfur dioxide, a colorless gas with a strong odor similar to a just-struck match. High concentrations of sulfur dioxide can affect breathing and may aggravate existing respiratory and cardiovascular disease. Sensitive populations include those with asthma, individuals with bronchitis or emphysema, children, and the elderly.

Although it is unknown whether any additional exceedances will occur, ACHD is recommending that Mon-Valley residents limit their outdoor activities, particularly if they are, or may be sensitive to, SO₂ particles, while repairs are being made. This recommendation includes residents of Braddock, Clairton, Dravosburg, Duquesne, East McKeesport, East Pittsburgh, Elizabeth Borough, Elizabeth Township, Forward, Glassport, Jefferson Hills, Liberty, Lincoln, McKeesport, North Braddock, North Versailles, Pleasant Hills, Port Vue, Versailles, Wall, West Elizabeth and West Mifflin.

Additional updates related to air quality data near the Clairton Coke Works and information regarding repairs and other steps being taken by U.S. Steel will be provided on ACHD’s Facebook page as they are available. All air quality data, including hourly reports, can be found online at: <https://www.allegenycounty.us/Health-Department/Programs/Air-Quality/Monitored-Data.aspx>.

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